



Department of Justice

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FLORIDA WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO CONSPIRACY TO LAUNDER MONEY

Agrees to Forfeit \$8 Million Generated by Illegal Gambling Business Hidden in Offshore Accounts

ALBANY, NEW YORK – Michele Lasso-Barraza, 30, of Parkland, Florida, pled guilty to conspiracy to commit money laundering today before United States District Judge Mae A. D'Agostino announced United States Attorney Richard S. Hartunian, Andrew W. Vale, Special Agent-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Albany Division, and Toni M. Weiracuh, Special Agent-in-Charge, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, New York Field Office. Lasso-Barraza, who faces up to 20 years in prison and a fine of \$500,000 or twice the value of the property involved in the transaction, whichever is greater, also agreed to forfeit her interest in \$8 million. Sentencing is scheduled for February 28, 2014 at 12:30 pm before Judge D'Agostino in Albany. Co-defendant, Philip Gurian, 52, of Boca Raton, Florida, previously pled guilty to the same charge and is scheduled to be sentenced on February 6, 2014.

United States Attorney Hartunian said, "Another defendant, Michele Lasso-Barraza, has now admitted to her role in laundering \$8 million generated by a sprawling illegal gambling operation which used the internet, phony corporations and offshore accounts. Those engaged in this type of activity, believing that their criminal conduct is well concealed, should now be on notice that law enforcement agencies at all levels – federal, state and local – are wise to their criminal tactics and committed to stopping them. I thank all of the law enforcement agencies involved in this investigation, particularly the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation and the Albany County Sheriff's Department, for their diligent work over several years to investigate this international money laundering operation, bring those responsible to justice and seize and forfeit their substantial ill-gotten gains."

Special Agent-in-Charge Vale said, "This case illustrates the FBI's ongoing commitment in working alongside our federal, state and local counterparts to root out illegal gambling locally, nationally and internationally. The plea of Ms. Lasso-Barraza to money laundering charges and the agreement to forfeit \$8 million illustrates that the FBI will not tolerate this type of criminal activity at any level."

Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Special Agent-in-Charge Weirauch said, "International money laundering is not the victimless crime that some may think it is. Money laundering, including the laundering of illegal gambling proceeds, facilitates the underground, untaxed economy, which, in turn, harms our nation's strength. IRS-Criminal Investigation is always ready to work with our law enforcement partners in the fight against this threat to our country."

As part of the plea, Lasso-Barraza admitted her involvement in an illegal gambling business run by Gurian and others which used internet websites that allowed bettors to place thousands of wagers from the Capital District, Florida, Indiana, California, Texas, and Nevada. She also admitted to participating in the laundering of at least \$8 million on behalf of Gurian that was generated from the illegal gambling business. That money was transferred to offshore accounts in Panama, Andorra, and the Cayman Islands. Lasso-Barraza created some sham entities and then set up some of the accounts in the names of those sham entities.

These charges were the result of a joint investigation initiated by the Albany County Sheriff's Office, and joined by the Albany County District Attorney's Office, the Saratoga District Attorney's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, and the Broward County Money Laundering Task Force. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Robert A. Sharpe.

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